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Greetings from California: Exploring the Golden State through Early Postcards



Mount Shasta, California (2018-089), Nancy Burgess, Postcard Collection, California State Archives, a division of the California Secretary of State's Office

A learning resource from the California State Archives, a division of the California Secretary of State's Office



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Description

This education guide provides activities centered on postcards from the California State Archives collection that invite students to critically examine and analyze California's past. Through California postcards, the following activities will allow students to explore different time periods of postcards, the San Francisco Ferry Building, and agriculture. Supported by California visual arts, the guide asks students to make comparisons between postcards and social media, develop a postcard marketing proposal for a city, and learn about California's agricultural history through a close examination of postcards.

Grade Levels-

Grades 9-10

Time

2.5 hours

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Curriculum Standards

California Common Core State Standards (Grades 9-10)

Pg. 81: Key Ideas and Details (9-10): 1

California Arts Standards (Grades 9-10)

Pg. 201: Use multiple approaches to begin creative endeavors, Visual Arts:
Prof.VA:Cr1.1

Pg. 203: Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present day life using
a contemporary practice of art or design, Visual Arts: VA:Cr1.2 (Proficient)

Pg. 213: Analyze and describe the impact that an exhibition or collection has
on personal awareness of social, cultural, or political beliefs and
understandings, Visual Arts: VA:Pr6 (Proficient)

Pg. 217: Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant
and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts, Visual
Arts: VA:Re8 (Proficient)

Pg. 221: Compare uses of art in a variety of societal, cultural, and historical
contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary, local, and
global contexts, Visual Arts: Acc.VA:Cn11

History of Postcards

Postcards, as we know them today, took time to evolve with different technologies and regulations, making postcards in each era unique. Although the idea of the postcard originated in Germany, the Austrian government issued the first postcard in 1869. Postcards quickly became a fast, inexpensive, and accessible way to communicate through the medium of an image. Postcards in the U.S. can be divided in the following periods:

Pioneer Period (1870-1898): Although the U.S. Congress passed an act that allowed privately printed cards in 1861, it was in 1873 that the first government produced postcard was issued, allowing only these postcards to bear the term “Postal Card.” The feature of this postcard was that one side was used for writing a message whereas the other side was used for the recipient’s address.

Private Mailing Card Period (1898-1901): By an Act of Congress on May 19, 1898, private publishers were allowed to produce postcards with the statement “Private Mailing Card.” The front side might or might not have an image and was used for writing a message. The address side included the words “This side is exclusively for the Address” or some variation of that. The following example shows the [front and back side of the Private Mailing Card Period’s postcard](#).

Postcard or Undivided Back Period (1901-1907): Private publishers were now allowed to use the term “Postcard” instead of “Private Mailing Card” and omit the line “authorized by Act of Congress May 19, 1898.” The front side of most postcards had images and the back side was used exclusively for addresses. The following example shows [the front and back side of the Undivided Back Period’s postcard](#).

Divided Back Period (1907-1915): During this “Golden Age,” postcards became extremely popular, and hundreds of millions were mailed. In 1907, private and government produced postcards were allowed to bear messages on the left half and addresses on right half of their back sides. The entire front side was used for an image. The majority of the postcards were printed in Germany because of the high-quality images and lithography the country produced. The following example shows [the front and back side of the Divided Back Period’s postcard](#).

White Border Period (1915-1930): World War I led to a decline in postcards from Germany, which severely affected the popularity of postcards.

American-made postcards from the U.S. could not compete with the high-quality images from Germany. This period received its name from the fact that printers during this time saved ink by not printing around the border of an image. In addition to a description of the image on the message side, the back side retained the features of the Divided Back Period. The following example shows [the front and back side of the White Border Period's postcard](#).

Linen Period (1930-1945): Postcards were printed using linen paper stock which gave them a textured feel. Curt Teich & Co., one of the most notable printers from the period, produced more quickly and used brighter dyes than their competitors. Like the previous two periods, the back side remained divided and usually featured information about the image. The following example shows [the front and back side of the Linen Period's postcard](#).

Photochrom Period (1945-Present): Photochrom postcards are in color and closely resemble photographs. However, under a magnifying glass, a dot pattern emerges. The image is on the front side whereas the back side has the address on right and message on left. These postcards first appeared in 1939 when the Union Oil Company placed them in their western service stations. Production declined during World War II (1939-1945), but quickly picked up after the war's end. The following example shows [the front and back side of the Photochrom Period's postcard](#).

Learning Activities

A. San Francisco Ferry Building

Direction: Examine the postcard and then read the transcript below for the San Francisco Ferry Building Postcard Activity.



San Francisco Ferry Building, 1903

(96-02-18), Unknown, Ephemera- Postcards

California State Archives, a division of the California Secretary of State's Office

Transcription for Ferry Building postcard:

Dear Ellie! I wish you could be here right now. The town is full of gars (G.A.R.'s) don't you know - the illumination at night is simply grand. This tower is also one blaze of light + of the street and arches. I'll show you a photo later. A great number of prominent buildings also have a beautiful display. I enter this building for the last time (on this visit) because I have to cross the bay for the train to Salt Lake City. I liked S.F. very much only the wind is so disagreeable. The weather was very nice these few days and I didn't wear my heavy jacket during the day, but the night is more or less foggy. Well, give love to your dear parents + grandma + accept kiss from your friend Marie G. Aug 19th 1903

San Francisco Ferry Building Postcard Activity

Directions: The postcard above mentions that Marie (the sender) is taking a train to Salt Lake City from San Francisco. There were no passenger airplanes in 1903 and people relied primarily on railways, ships, or horse carriages to travel long distances. Imagine you were visiting the San Francisco Ferry building in 1903 and you encountered grand illumination of the building in night.

Questions

Complete the following activity and questions below.

1. Write a postcard message to your friend, family, or someone in your community describing your experience.
2. Did you notice the message was written in cursive handwriting? Why do you think cursive is no longer commonplace?
3. List three similarities and three differences between postcards and today's social media (e.g., Facebook and Instagram).

B. Marketing your city through postcards

Directions: Imagine your city has developed a postcard marketing proposal to attract tourists using postcards as souvenirs. Complete the following activity and answer the question below.

1. First, take a photograph of the most iconic landmark or something that captures the essence of your city (e.g., downtown, a historical building, street festival, stadium, or park). If you do not have a camera, you can use an online photo of your city.
2. Next, create a postcard by folding a piece of paper in half. Use the back side to write the recipient's address on the right and leave the blank space on the left for a message. Paste the photo on the front side of the paper.
3. Lastly, write your message on the left side describing your experience visiting this city and why the recipient should also visit.

Question

What recommendations would you make to your City Council to increase tourists using postcards?

C. Agriculture in California

Directions: Read the following overview of California's Agriculture, State Archives' online exhibit, [Farmworkers in the Land of Plenty](#), and examine the postcard. Then answer the questions below.

Overview of California's Agriculture

As a leading state in agricultural production, California produces close to half of U.S.-grown fruits, nuts, and vegetables. The Giannini Foundation of Agricultural Economics describes the following important periods in the state's agriculture history: 1) After California became the 31ST U.S. state in 1850, it gradually became a pioneer in large wheat farms with labor-saving and scale-intensive technologies by adopting gang plows, large headers, and combines. 2) Between 1890 and 1914, California's agriculture transformed from wheat production to smaller-scale, intensive fruit cultivation. 3) By early 1900s, the state had adopted sugar beet, vegetables, and cotton as part of its growing agricultural commodities.

The shift from extensive grain-growing operations to smaller-scale, intensive fruit cultivation occurred due to declines in real interest rates and "biological" learning. Biological learning resulted in increased productivity as farmers gained knowledge of how to grow new crops. Moreover, there was also growth in canning, packing, food machinery, and transportation services.

With arid and mountainous landscape, irrigation became one of the most critical lifelines of California's agriculture. According to the Giannini Foundation of Agricultural Economics, the state's irrigation expansion happened in two phases. The first irrigation expansion was led by small-scale private initiatives from 1900 to 1920s. The second expansion happened after World War II through federal and state projects. As a result, California is also known as the most hydrologically altered region with levees, reservoirs, aqueducts, canals, and dams.

The postcards below and in Section D capture two important agricultural commodities of California: lettuce and orange. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, California ranks first in terms of lettuce production in the United States. In addition, California ranks second after Florida in terms of orange production.

Source: [Giannini Foundation of Agricultural Economics](#)



Lettuce in Bloom in California, 1908
(96-02-18), Unknown, Ephemera-Postcards
California State Archives, a division of the California Secretary of State's Office

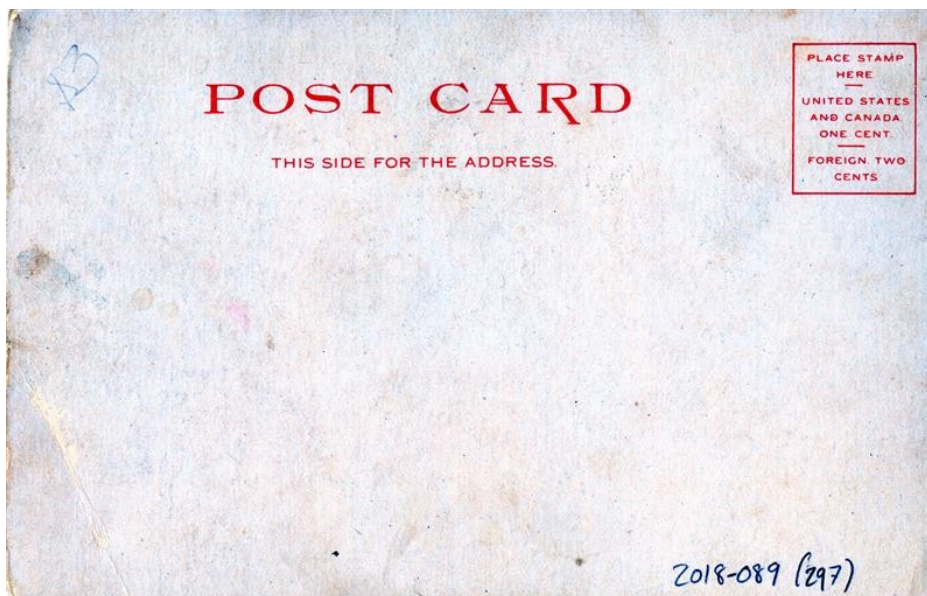
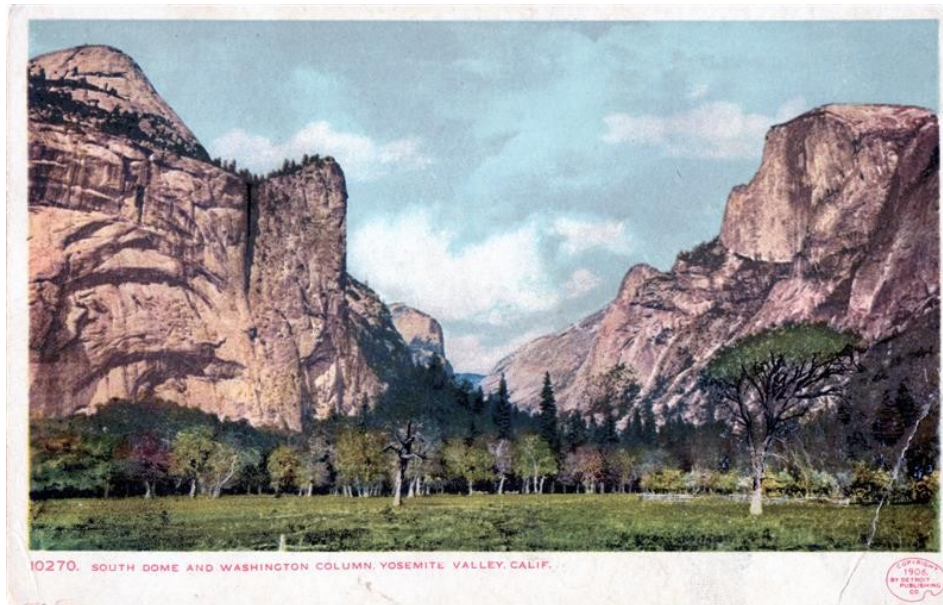
Questions

1. How did California's agriculture transition from large grain farms to intensive fruit cultivation? Use the overview of California's agriculture section and State Archives' online exhibit, [Farmworkers in the Land of Plenty \(Slides 2-4\)](#), to base your answer.
2. Can you name California's top-10 valued agricultural commodities (vegetables, fruits, nuts, dairy, and animals)? Value implies agricultural commodities that generate the most revenue. Compare your results with answers in the appendix section.
3. Choose a type of agricultural farm, field, or fresh produce that should be used to represent California's agriculture on a postcard. Explain your reasoning.
4. What do you think are some of the current challenges surrounding California's agricultural production? Think of significant environmental events that you have noticed in the state or news.

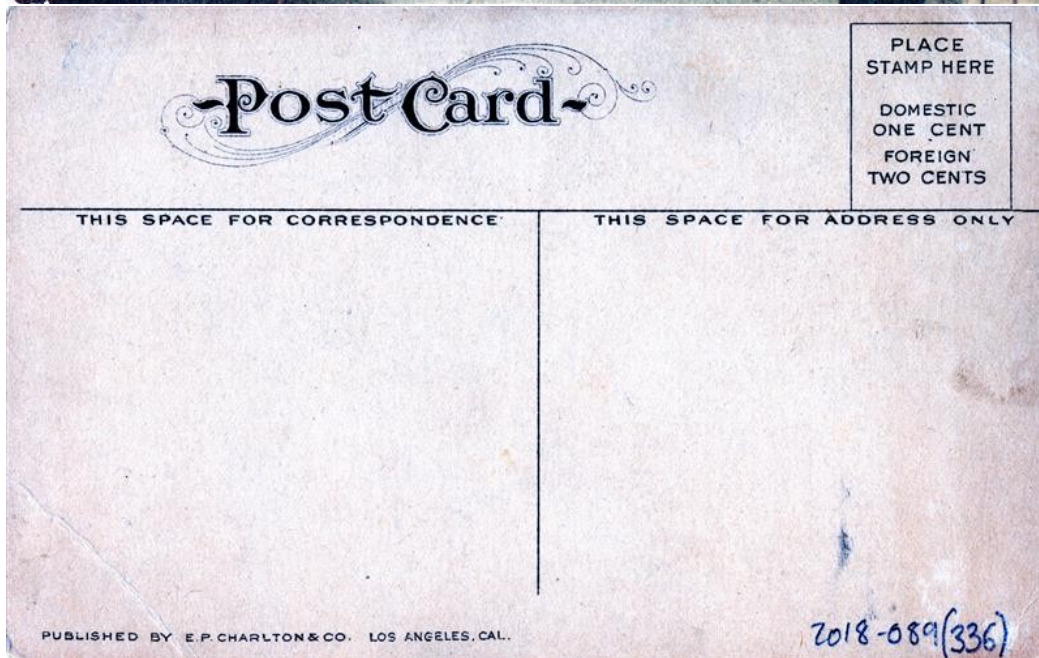
D. Time Periods of Postcards

Directions: Examine the Yosemite Valley and Orange Packing in California postcards below. Then, answer the following questions. Please note that a description of these postcards has been provided in the appendix for visually impaired students.

South Dome and Washington Column, Yosemite Valley, Calif.
(2018-089), Nancy Burgess, Postcard Collection
California State Archives, a division of the California Secretary of State's Office



Orange Packing in California
(2018-089), Nancy Burgess, Postcard Collection
California State Archives, a division of the California Secretary of State's Office



Questions

1. What are the similarities and differences between the Yosemite Valley and Orange Packing in California postcards?
2. What are the periods of the Yosemite Valley and Orange Packing in California postcards based on the history of the postcard section? Why? See the appendix section for answers.

E. Reflection

1. What have you learned about history and the visual arts after investigating the historical postcards in this guide?
2. How has today's visual mediums of communication changed from the past?

F. Appendix

Answer key for Section-C, Agriculture in California

1. Top-10 valued agricultural commodities of California in 2020
 1. Dairy Products, Milk — \$7.47 billion
 2. Almonds — \$5.62 billion
 3. Grapes — 4.48 billion
 4. Pistachios — \$2.87 billion
 5. Cattle and Calves — \$2.74 billion
 6. Lettuce — \$2.28 billion
 7. Strawberries — \$1.99 billion
 8. Tomatoes — \$1.20 billion
 9. Floriculture — \$967 million
 10. Walnuts — \$958 million

Source: [California Department of Food and Agriculture](#)

Description and Answers for Section-D, Time Periods of Postcards

Description: The postcard's frontside shows Yosemite Valley with a huge granite rock known as the South Dome on one side and a roughly 1800-foot-high rock formation known as Washington Column on the other. The forest is covered with grass and pine trees. The postcard has a white border with a caption at the bottom stating "10270. South Dome and Washington Column, Yosemite Valley, Calif." A circular logo on the bottom right also says "Copyright 1906 by Detroit Publishing Co." The backside has the headline, "POST CARD - THIS SIDE FOR THE ADDRESS"

Answer: Yosemite Valley postcard is from the Undivided Back period (1901-1907) because the frontside has an image with less space for a message and the backside is for the address. In addition, the backside also uses the term postcard. There is also year 1906 printed on the bottom right side of postcard's frontside.

Description: The postcard's frontside shows a factory packing image with several men and women standing with orange carts. The caption states, "979 - Orange Packing in California." The backside has a "Post Card"

headline with two columns. The headline on the right side of column states, "This space for address only" and the headline for the left side states, "This space for correspondence"

Answer: Orange Packing in California postcard is from the Divided Back Period (1907-1915) because the frontside is entirely covered with an image and the backside's left half is used for message and the right half for address.